



Norway

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2002](#)

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Norway is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy with King Harald V as the Head of State. It is governed by a prime minister, cabinet, and a 165-seat Parliament (Storting) that is elected every 4 years through free and fair elections; it cannot be dissolved. The judiciary is independent.

The national police have primary responsibility for internal security; however, in times of crisis, such as internal disorder or natural catastrophe, the police may call on the armed forces for assistance. In such circumstances, the armed forces are under police authority. The civilian authorities maintained effective control of the security forces.

The country, which is an advanced industrial state with a mixed economy combining private and public ownership that provides a high standard of living for residents, had a population of approximately 4.5 million. The key industries were oil and gas, metals, engineering, shipbuilding, fishing, and manufacturing (including fish processing equipment). The leading exports were oil and gas, manufactured goods, fish, and metals. The economy was characterized by low unemployment and labor shortages in many sectors.

The Government generally respected the rights of its citizens, and the law and the judiciary provided effective means of dealing with individual instances of abuse. Violence against women and abuse of children existed. There were reports of trafficking in persons. Norway was invited by the Community of Democracies' (CD) Convening Group to attend the November 2002 second CD Ministerial Meeting in Seoul, Republic of Korea, as a participant.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

In January three persons were sentenced to prison for the 2001 killing of a boy of African parentage.(see Section 5).

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them.

Prison conditions generally met international standards. Men and women were held separately. Juveniles were not held separately from adults; however, it was extremely rare for juveniles to be held in prison. Juveniles generally were cared for by social welfare authorities. Pretrial detainees were held separately from convicted prisoners.

The Government permits visits by independent human rights observers, although there were no such visits during

the year.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the Government generally observed these prohibitions.

The law authorizes the Government to use forced exile, and this practice is used in rare cases.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the Government generally respected this provision in practice.

The court system consists of the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court Appellate Court, superior courts, county courts for criminal cases, magistrate courts for civil cases, and claims courts. Special courts include the Impeachment Court (composed of parliamentarians), the labor court, trusteeship courts, fishery courts, and land ownership severance courts.

The law provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. Courts provide counsel to the indigent.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution and the law prohibit such actions, and the Government generally respected these prohibitions in practice; violations were subject to effective legal sanction.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to ensure freedom of speech and of the press, including academic freedom.

There were 177 newspapers, 5 national television stations, and 6 national radio stations in the country. In addition, there were numerous regional and local newspapers and television and radio stations. Two television channels and five radio channels were state-owned. Access to the Internet was widely available and unrestricted.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The law provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

The state church is the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, which is supported financially by the State and to which 87 percent of the population nominally belong. The Constitution requires that the King and one-half of the Cabinet belong to this church. Public debate on the relationship between church and state increased during the year. Other denominations operated freely.

A religious community is required to register with the Government only if it desires state support, which is provided to all registered denominations on a proportional basis in accordance with membership.

A 1995 law introduced the subject "Religious Knowledge and Education in Ethics" into the school system. The course covers world religions and philosophy and promotes tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs; however, based on the country's history and the importance of Christianity to society, the course devotes the most time to Christianity. All children must attend this mandatory course, and there are no exceptions for children of other faiths; students may be exempted from participating in or performing specific religious acts such as church services or prayer, but they may not forgo instruction in the subject as a whole. Organizations for atheists as well as Muslim communities have contested the legality of forced religious teaching. In 2001 Parliament concluded that steps should be taken to make it easier for parents to request that their children be exempted from parts of the class and directed the Ministry of Education to draft a standard form for this purpose, which was sent to all schools. Schools were instructed to implement the use of the form. In 2001 the Supreme Court unanimously rejected the Norwegian Humanist Association case claiming that the teaching of this class was a breach of freedom of religion and a parent's right to make choices for their children. On September 17, the Norwegian Humanist Association brought the case before the European Court of Human Rights where it remained pending at year's end.

The Workers' Protection and Working Environment Act permits prospective employers to ask applicants for employment in private or religious schools and day care centers whether they will respect and teach Christian beliefs and principles.

Muslims encountered some difficulties in obtaining local permission to build mosques in areas where they were concentrated.

For a more detailed discussion see the 2002 International Religious Freedom Report.

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The law provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice.

The law provides for the granting of refugee and asylee status in accordance with the the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Government cooperated with the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. The Government grants first asylum. In 2001 the Government granted protective residency (which entails the granting of permanent residence permits) to 5,906 persons. The total included: Political asylum for 292 persons; temporary collective residency permits for 40 Iraqi Kurds; and asylum as U.N. quota refugees for 1,269 persons. Immigration authorities rejected 8,976 applications for protective residency. In addition, 12,095 persons received residency status through a family reunification program.

In 2001 the number of persons seeking asylum increased by 36 percent to 14,782 persons. In late 2001, the Government allocated additional resources to the Immigration Directorate, which initiated reforms to speed up application processes for the increasing numbers of asylum seekers and to meet new demands as a growing number of applications were considered to be unjustified.

In 1999 the Government granted temporary collective protection and 1-year residence permits to 8,000 Kosovar Albanians, 1,500 of whom returned voluntarily to Kosovo in 2000. Of those who had returned to Kosovo, 1,200 returned to Norway as refugees later in 2000. Kosovar Albanians remaining in the country were required to apply for asylum, and most did so. By the beginning of the year, the Immigration Directorate had processed most of these Kosovar Albanian asylum applications: 135 were granted asylum; 904 were granted residency on humanitarian grounds; and 4,500 were rejected.

There were no reports of the forced return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage.

Women were increasingly well represented at all levels of government. No restrictions in law or practice hindered women's participation in government and politics. There were 57 women in the 165-seat Parliament, women headed 8 of the 19 government ministries, chaired 5 of 15 standing committees in Parliament, and headed 2 of the 6 main political parties.

In addition to participating freely in the national political process, the Norwegian Sami (formerly known as Lapps) elect their own constituent assembly, the Sameting. Under the law establishing the 39-seat body, the Sameting is a consultative group, which meets regularly to deal with "all matters, which in [its] opinion are of special importance to the Sami people." In practice the Sameting has been most interested in protecting the group's language and cultural rights and in influencing decisions on resources and lands where Sami are a majority (see Section 5). A report on the activity of the Sami Assembly is submitted to Parliament annually, and every 4 years a report on the main principles of Norwegian Sami policy is presented in Parliament. In 2001 the Council of State appointed a new Sami Rights Committee. During the year, the Government established a Center for the Rights of Indigenous People as a follow-up to the Government's Plan of Action for Human Rights. The Center sought to increase knowledge and understanding of the rights of indigenous people and the rights of the Sami by collecting and disseminating information identifying research needs. The Government transferred funds for a number of Sami cultural institutions to the Sami Assembly to make it directly responsible for the Sami cultural heritage.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were very cooperative and responsive to their views.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs oversees the human rights portfolio. In 2000 the Parliament issued a white paper on human rights that stressed the importance of incorporating human rights into law and society in general. Based on the principle that each cabinet minister is responsible for promoting human rights in his or her field, the Government established a separate committee of state secretaries responsible for ensuring that human rights issues receive political emphasis and attention.

There is a parliamentary ombudsman for public administration who is also responsible for promoting human rights through his work on individual cases.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, disability, language, or social status, and the Government generally enforced this prohibition in practice; however, violence and sexual harassment against women remained problems.

Women

Violence against women, including domestic violence, was a problem. In 2001 there were 653 rapes reported, with 41 convictions. The police believed that increases in reported rapes and domestic abuse were due largely to greater willingness among women to report these crimes. The police investigated and prosecuted such crimes with vigor and also have instituted special programs to prevent rape and domestic violence and to counsel victims. Following up on its 2000 plan of action to prevent domestic violence against women, the Government established a Forum on Violence Against Women to assess how public services deal with women who have been subjected to violence and abuse. Public and private organizations ran several shelters that gave battered women an alternative to returning to a violent domestic situation. Each of the country's 19 counties had a number of such shelters. In 2001 the country's shelters registered 42,200 overnight stays.

There were reports of trafficking in women for prostitution (see Section 6.f.).

The Gender Equality Ombudsman--charged with enforcing the Gender Equality Act--processed complaints of sexual discrimination. In 2001 there were 337 complaints and 525 telephone inquiries to the Ombudsman; women filed approximately 50 percent of the complaints, men filed 33 percent, organizations filed 14 percent, and the ombudsman's office directly filed 5 percent.

An amendment to the Working Environment Act provides that "employees shall not be subjected to harassment or other unseemly behavior." Employers that violate these provisions, including the harassment clause, are subject to fines or prison sentences of up to 2 years, depending on the seriousness of the offense.

The law protects the rights of women. According to the law, "women and men engaged in the same activity shall have equal wages for work of equal value"; however, according to the equal rights ombudsman's office, which

monitors enforcement of the law, women generally received 10 to 15 percent less pay and benefits than men for work of "equal value."

In July Parliament amended the Gender Equality Act to improve the position of women in society. The Act applies to all sectors of society, with the exception of the internal affairs of religious communities.

Children

The Government is committed strongly to children's rights and welfare; it amply funds systems of education and medical care. The Government provides free education for children through the postsecondary level. Education is compulsory for 10 years, or through the ninth grade; most children stay in school at least until the age of 18. There was no difference in the treatment of girls and boys in education or health care services. An independent Children's Ombudsman Office, within the Ministry of Children and Families, is responsible for the protection of children under the law.

Abuse of children was a problem. In 2001 a total of 697 sexual assaults by nonfamily members and 120 assaults by family members were reported. In 2001 welfare services assisted 33,312 abused or neglected children, 6,215 of whom were taken from their homes and placed in government institutions or in respite homes.

Persons with Disabilities

There was no discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, or in the provision of other state services. The law mandates access to public buildings for persons with disabilities, and the Government generally enforced these provisions in practice.

Indigenous People

The Government has taken steps to protect the cultural rights of the indigenous Sami by providing Sami language instruction at schools in their areas, radio and television programs broadcast or subtitled in Sami, and subsidies for newspapers and books oriented toward the Sami (see Section 3). A Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Affairs deals specifically with Sami issues. The royal family supported the Sami through their interest in Sami culture and by visiting Sami areas.

National/Racial/Minorities

In 2001 a 15-year-old boy with an African father was killed in Oslo. Police believed the killing was racially motivated. Authorities charged three young persons with aiding and abetting voluntary manslaughter for their role in the killing; all three were linked to a neo-Nazi organization. In January the 3 defendants were convicted of the killings and sentenced to terms of 16, 15, and 3 years of prison. The court commented that the murder was clearly racially motivated. The two defendants with the longest sentences appealed, but in December a superior court lengthened the sentences to 18 and 17 years, respectively; an appeal to the Supreme Court was pending at year's end.

In December the Supreme Court acquitted a neo-Nazi charged with racist remarks made at a demonstration in 2000. The decision reversed a lower court ruling that the remarks violated the country's anti-racism law.

In July the Government presented a new Plan of Action to Combat Racism and Discrimination that includes specific goals in target areas, such as the police and judicial system, and proposes legislation to prohibit discrimination in the labor and housing markets.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law provides workers with the right to associate freely. With membership totaling approximately 60 percent of the workforce, unions played an important role in political and economic life, and the Government consults them on important economic and social problems. Although the largest trade union federation was associated with the Labor Party, all unions and labor federations were free of party and government control.

The law prohibits antiunion discrimination. The Labor Court deals with complaints of antiunion discrimination; however, there were no such complaints during the year.

Unions are free to form federations and to affiliate internationally; unions maintained strong ties with such international bodies as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

All workers, including government employees and military personnel, had and exercised the right to organize and bargain collectively. Collective bargaining was widespread, and most wage earners were covered by negotiated settlements, either directly or through understandings that extend the contract terms to workers outside the main labor federation and the employers' bargaining group.

Workers had the right to strike; however, the Government had the right, with the approval of the Parliament, to invoke compulsory arbitration under certain circumstances. In 1997 the Supreme Court ruled that regulations on compulsory arbitration do not violate international commitments. The case was appealed to the European Court of Human Rights, which dismissed the application in June.

During the year, there was one significant strike--by hotel and restaurant workers. The strike, which lasted 33 days, concluded after personal mediation by union leaders.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The law prohibits forced or bonded labor, including by children, and there were no reports such practices occurred. The Directorate of Labor Inspections (DLI) is responsible for compliance with the law.

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

Children 13 to 18 years of age may be employed part-time in light work that will not affect adversely their health, development, or schooling. Minimum age rules were observed in practice and enforced by the DLI.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no legislated or specified minimum wage, but wages normally fall within a national scale negotiated by labor, employers, and the Government at the local and company level. Wages increased this year approximately 5 to 6 percent. The average income, not including extensive social benefits, provides a decent standard of living for a worker and family.

Normal working hours are mandated by law and limited to 37½ hours per week. The law also provides for 25 working days of paid leave per year (31 days for those over age 60). A 28-hour rest period is mandated legally on weekends and holidays.

The law provides for safe and physically acceptable working conditions for all employed persons. Specific standards are set by the DLI in consultation with nongovernmental experts. According to the law, environment committees composed of management, workers, and health personnel must be established in all enterprises with 50 or more workers, and safety delegates must be elected in all organizations. Workers have the right to remove themselves from situations that endanger their health. The DLI effectively monitored compliance with labor legislation and standards.

f. Trafficking in Persons

No law specifically criminalizes trafficking in persons, although existing legislation may be used to prosecute trafficking cases. There were no prosecutions for such offenses during the year.

Recognizing that trafficking is a growing problem in the country, the Government increased focus on the issue throughout the year and hosted a conference on trafficking in October. During the year, the Ministry of Justice and the Police Directorate established a national project to combat organized crime, specifically targeting trafficking.

The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs coordinates an interministerial working group that is responsible for implementing trafficking resolutions and recommendations from the U.N. and the European Council. During the country's 2002 chairmanship of the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Council began a campaign against trafficking in women in the Nordic and Baltic States. As a result, the Government presented mandatory ethical guidelines for government employees that prohibit the purchase and acceptance of sexual services.

The country was a destination for women trafficked for the purpose of prostitution, particularly from Russia and the Baltic States. There were also occasional reports of children from Russia being trafficked into the country to work in petty theft rings.

Victims of trafficking in the country had the same legal rights as other foreigners to apply for residency, asylum, welfare, social aid, and emergency health care. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs is responsible for assisting possible victims of trafficking; however, most asylum requests by victims were denied. The Government increased awareness of trafficking by raising the issue in a number of speeches and fora. NGOs conducted outreach programs to provide trafficking victims with information on their legal rights and available health and other services.